

**Higher Education Authority
Report of Meeting of the Board of the HEA held on 30th October 2024**

- Present: Dr Niall Connors, Chairperson (agenda items 1-17)
Mr Dermot McCarthy (agenda items 1-17)
Dr Rory O’Sullivan (agenda items 1-17)
Dr Rosemary Day (agenda items 1-17)
Ms Nessa McEniff (agenda items 1-17)
Ms Paula Fyans, (agenda items 1-17)
Professor Anne Scott (agenda items 1-17)
Professor Mark Rogers (agenda items 1-17)
Ms Lianne Patterson (agenda items 5-17)
- Apologies: Dr Fiona Killard-Lynch
Mr Chris Clifford
- In attendance: Prof Marie Clarke, SETL Committee Chair (agenda items 1-17)
- Dr Alan Wall (agenda items 1-17.1)
Ms Orla Nugent (agenda items 9-16)
Mr Tim Conlon (agenda items 9-16)
Ms Caitriona Ryan (agenda items 9-16)
Dr Vivienne Patterson (agenda items 9-16)
Ms Pearl Cunningham (agenda items 9-16)
Ms Orla Christle (agenda items 9-16)
Mr Ciaran Mc Caffrey (agenda item 10)
Dr Louise Callinan (agenda items 9-16)
Ms Sheena Duffy (agenda items 9-16)

Conflicts of Interest

No conflicts of interest disclosed.

Quorum

The quorum for HEA Board meetings, six members, was met.

Opening Remarks

The Chairperson, Dr Niall Connors, addressed the Board and acknowledged that he had been appointed Interim Chairperson of the HEA by the Minister for FHERIS, pending the appointment of a Chairperson via the Public Appointments Service process. He also acknowledged the Board’s duty to progress actions and monitor the performance of the HEA at a strategic level, using the Corporate Strategic Plan as a

guide, and to ensure the Executive are enabled to deliver the strategy at an operational level.

1. Report of meeting held 17th September 2024

Members raised some queries on the report, which the Chair agreed to discuss further with the Executive.

Decision: The Chair will discuss proposed amendments with the Executive.

2. Matters arising/Review of Outstanding Issues

Members reviewed the log of outstanding items, and Ms McEniff confirmed she had several suggested additions, which she will raise with the Deputy Secretary.

Decision: Members noted this item.

3. CEO Update - UL and Public Accounts Committee

The CEO briefed the Board on the recent appearance of the HEA at a meeting of the Public Accounts Committee, which was focused on the financial and governance issues at the University of Limerick. The CEO also confirmed that the HEA continues to engage with the University in relation to the Section 64 process.

Members thanked Dr Wall for this update.

Decision: Members noted this update.

4. Update on TU Dublin

The CEO briefed Members on the HEA's ongoing engagement with TU Dublin on issues of governance and financial management and proposed next steps.

Members noted this update.

Ms Fyans stated that if she was being asked to make a decision on the next steps in relation to TU Dublin that she would require a timeline on all of the activities to date. The CEO advised should that arise one will be supplied.

Decision: Members noted this update.

5. Report of Audit, Risk and Finance Committee Meeting 23rd September

Professor Scott presented this item in the absence of the Committee Chair.

5.1 Committee Governance Document Review

The Committee recommended approval of the Committee name as the "Audit, Risk and Finance Committee (ARFC)". The Committee will also consider whether cybersecurity expertise will be obtained via an external Committee member or by the provision of external expertise as required.

Decision: The Board approved the name of the Committee.

5.2 Update on HEA ICT and Security

The Committee received a briefing from the interim Head of IT in relation to the NIS2 Directive and requested that the HEA's security partners present findings from the NIS compliance review at the next meeting. The Committee also recommended that a Management of Change process be mapped out in the IT section.

In addition, the following was noted:

- The positive update provided to the Committee by the Comptroller and Auditor General on the 2023 Audit and the significant improvements implemented on financial processes and systems as well as the support provided to the audit.
- Workshop on Risk Management provided to the Committee from Deloitte.
- Procurement Report, which identified no instances of non-compliant procurement.
- Members also thanked Mr Mellett for his support to the Committee and wished him well on his retirement as Head of Corporate Affairs.

Members noted the Report of the Committee.

6. Report of System Funding and Oversight Committee Meeting 1st October

Dr O'Sullivan presented this report.

6.1 Governance Document

The Committee recommended approval of the Committee name as "System Funding and Oversight Committee", and requested an addition to the Governance Document to clarify that meeting papers will be circulated in secure electronic format seven days in advance of the next meeting.

Decision: The Board approved the name of the Committee and the proposed addition to the Governance Document.

6.2 Approval of Proposed 2024 allocation in respect of IReL

The Committee recommended approval of €3.6m in respect of the Irish Research e-Library (IReL) from the 2024 research top-slice allocation.

Decision: The Board approved this allocation.

6.3 HEA Research and Research Policy - Update on the HEA Covid-19 Related Costed Extension Funding Scheme

Decision: The Committee noted the update on the HEA Covid-19 Related Costed Extension funding scheme.

6.4 Annual Governance Statements Review

The Committee noted the Review of the Annual Governance Statements for HEIs 2022/2023. The Committee suggested that an alignment of ICT Security AGSS requirements with the Public Sector Cyber Security Baseline Standards. This would provide a point of comparability between institutions. This was agreed.

A member queried if there are any particular areas of non-compliance over time?

The Chair confirmed that compliance levels are improving over time.

6.5 University and Technological Sector Income Trend Reports

Dr O'Sullivan highlighted to Members that these reports were noted by the Committee. One member raised this issue of the debt to income ratio for the universities. This matter has been referred to the next meeting of the Committee.

6.6 HEA Funding Framework

The Chair noted that the Committee considered the approach to the HEA Funding Framework and the approach to the finalisation of the HEA Funding Framework in accordance with the HEA Act 2022.

Members noted the Report of the Committee.

7. Report of the Student Engagement and Teaching & Learning Committee 26th September

Professor Clarke presented this report.

7.1 Remaining Teaching and Learning Funding 2024

The Committee recommended the Board approve the proposed approach to the remaining T&L funding for 2024, which would be equally distributed to HEIs to support path-finder projects (€200,000) and endorsed the proposed allocation to the Ireland-Canada initiative (€250,000). The Committee sought delegated authority

from the Board as per ToR point 4.2 to oversee the allocation of the remaining T&L funding, due to the short timeframe remaining.

Decision: The Board approved the proposed allocations and delegation to the Committee to approve the remaining 2024 T&L funding.

7.2 Mental Health and Wellbeing Funding

The Committee recommended that the Board approve the proposed approach to the €5 million Mental Health & Wellbeing funding for 2024, which will support HEI projects in this area.

Decision: The Board approved the proposed approach to allocation of Mental Health & Wellbeing funding.

Members noted the Committee's report.

8. Verbal Report of the System Development Committee 9th October

Dr Connors gave a verbal update on the meeting of the Committee.

8.1 External Membership

The Committee recommended the nomination of Professor Marie Claire Van Hout as an external member of the Committee.

Decision: The Board approved this proposal.

8.2 TU Development Funding

The Committee recommended the allocation of €1.5m for a new technological sector representative body under TSAF.

Decision: The Board approved this proposal.

8.3 SUSI & National Employers Survey Reports

The Committee noted the data analysis carried out on SUSI Student Grant Recipients and recommended approval of the report for publication. The Committee also noted the findings from the 2024 National Employers Survey and recommended approval of the report for publication.

Decision: The Board approved the publication of the reports.

8.4 EDI Funding Allocation

The Committee agreed to recommend approval of allocation of €498,542 relating to the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Enhancement Fund 2024 and noted the proposed approach to the allocation of Ending Sexual Violence and Harassment funding.

Decision: The Board approved this allocation.

9. Memo 52/24 Proposals for HEA Research Committee

Ms Ryan presented this item. The Board was requested to approve the establishment of a Research Committee.

The Committee will support two key functions of the HEA under the HEA Act 2022;

-plan for research in the higher education system and make recommendations to the Minister on the overall higher education research system,

-promote, support and fund excellent research in the higher education system in all disciplines, in accordance with national research policy and in co-operation, as may be appropriate, with Ministers of the Government, Government agencies and such other bodies as An tÚdarás considers appropriate.

The Committee will support the HEA in the protection of the research infrastructure in HE and will also oversee the allocation of HEA research funding.

It was noted that Professor Dan Carey made a significant contribution to the Irish Research Council and it was suggested that a representative from Taighde Eireann, could be considered as an external member of this Committee.

Decision: The Board approved the establishment of the Research Committee, and the Chair agreed to carry out an Expression of Interest process with Members interested in joining the Committee and to rationalise membership across the Committees.

10. Memo 53/24 HEA Office Fit-Out and Lease Extension

Mr McCaffrey presented this item. Members were requested to approve two proposals:

1. Entering into contract for the proposed fit out works to the 4th Floor of 3 Shelbourne Buildings,
2. Extension of the HEA's lease period to 2033, with a rent review in 2028, for all three floors of 3 Shelbourne Buildings.

The rationale for this is the increase in headcount in HEA staff. The HEA along with a design team have been progressing the design and procurement of the proposed fit out works for the 4th Floor in line with the processes under the Capital Works Management Framework (CWMF).

In terms of the lease, the HEA engaged professional property advisors who negotiated the proposed lease extension with the landlord.

The following was noted:

- It was clarified that the provisions within the lease, including the rent review, are standard and consistent across the industry.
- The HEA obtained sanction from DFHERIS to extend the lease period to 2033.

Decision: The Board approved the proposal to enter into a contract with Mc Keon for up to €1,875,030 (incl VAT) for the fit out of the fourth floor of 3 Shelbourne Buildings.

Decision : The Board approved the extension of the lease period for HEA's office space in 3 Shelbourne Buildings to 2033, with a rent review in 2028 for all 3 floors.

11. Memo 54/24 Updates to Findings from CSO Analysis of PhD Graduates Outcomes

Dr Quinn presented this item. Members were requested to note updates to the report, and to approve its publication. Following discussion at the HEA Board meeting in May 2024, the report has been updated to provide information on the comparative earnings of Doctoral Graduates and further references to national and international data.

Members raised the following queries:

- It was suggested to include a summary infographic in the report.
- How is the data compared? Between year one post degree and year one post PhD. Members felt that comparing Level 8 and Level 10 outcomes 1 year after graduation was not a direct comparison, and there should be a more direct comparison of Level 8 and Level 10 earnings to take account of time in the labour force. The Executive agreed to provide a table showing Median Weekly Earnings of Graduates of 2010, at Levels 8, 9 and 10, up to 10 years after graduation.

Decision: Members approved the publication of the report.

12. Memo 55/24 HEI Pension Appeals

Dr Wall presented this item. The Board were requested to note the determinations made by the CEO on two pension appeals submitted by staff members in higher education institutions.

Decision: Members noted this item.

13. Memo 56/24 Schedule of Board meetings for 2025 including offsite

Ms Noonan presented this item. The Board were requested to approve the proposed 2025 dates for Board and Committee meetings. Professor Rogers asked if the Committee dates could be double checked to ensure there was appropriate time for the Board to receive their recommended decisions. The Deputy Secretary agreed to consult the Committee Secretariats. Ms Fyans noted that some of the meetings fell around school holidays.

Decision: Members approved the proposed dates, pending review of the Committee dates to ensure a lack of conflicts.

14. Memo 57/24 Executive Report

The following issues were discussed:

- It is anticipated that the Policy Forum, which consists of representatives with responsibility for student progression and retention in their respective HEIs, will hold its first meeting in early 2025 to progress the establishment of a national evidence base on student progression in higher education.
- It was queried how long it is envisaged that the Distributed Campus Fund will continue? There is no set time; the HEA was directed by the Department to ask the institutions to provide feedback on how the funding is being used, which will inform future decision making.
- It was confirmed that IT security awareness training is ongoing.
- It was confirmed that the projected student enrolment numbers for PATH 4 Phase 2 is approximately 170-180.
- It was confirmed that the CEO is the prescribed person for protected disclosures in accordance with the provisions of the Protected Disclosures Act 2014 as amended ("Act") and Statutory Instrument (S.I.) 367/2020, in relation to: a) the planning and development of higher education and research in the State; or b) the funding for universities and certain designated institutions of higher education.

Members noted the Executive Report.

15. Corporate Risk Register

Ms Noonan presented this item, and noted that a risk has been converted into an issue on the Register, as the risk has materialised. This is in relation to the loss of expertise in relation to HEI pension appeals with the retirement of the Head of Corporate Affairs. This has been raised formally with DFHERIS.

Members queried the ongoing high rating of the cybersecurity risk, and Ms Noonan explained that this is due to the ever-evolving threat landscape of cyber risk. Members also queried the persistent difficulties in the filling of vacancies, particular in Capital roles, which the Executive continues to focus on.

Decision: Members noted the Corporate Risk Register.

16. AOB

Dr O’Sullivan noted that the Board were approaching the end of the first year of their term, and thanked the Executive for the quality of their work and the level of support provided to Members.

17. Members Only Session

The Interim Chair provided a briefing to members on the regulatory ecosystem. This was followed by a discussion on strategic items for 2025, and it was noted that this will form the basis for the Board Away Day early next year.

Next Meeting: The date of the next meeting was agreed as Tuesday 17th December 2024.

Chairperson

Date